

Steering Committee Members Ward 6 NPA

Matt Grady
Mary Riley
Joel FitzGerald
Nelson Martelle
Michelle Mraz
Caroline Hauser

NPA Meeting November 6, 2020

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81027856568> (Meeting ID: 810 2785 6568, No Password)

Opening of meeting 6:30 PM

Public Forum

Gail Rose: No Cause Evictions - the point of this rule is to protect tenants, but it can have unintended consequences that haven't been thoroughly thought through and might dissuade good landlords from owning properties. There are many good reasons and examples why a landlord should be able to end a lease. For example: family members moving in, renovations, protection for other tenants when there are problem tenants. Landlords should be able to retain control over their own properties, it's a contract with an expiration date and when the contract expires the two parties are no longer obligated to each other.

Sandy Yusen (External Relations and Communications Director, Champlain College) - Champlain is going to be sharing information on FPF tomorrow (posted on their website as well) about plans for the end of semester, the next few months, beginning of spring semester. Will be shifting to fully remote instruction after Thanksgiving and remain remote through the end of semester. Spring semester classes begin virtually January 25, in person classes begin February 8. More details will be available on website. Dashboard of COVID cases available at: <https://view.champlain.edu/champlain-college-covid-19-testing-dashboard/>

Matt Grady asks Joan Shannon - we are thinking about inviting some City Place developers for Dec meeting, it'd be nice to get them on quickly because of excitement around project. Joan comments that it's a good idea, notes to keep in mind that their POV is one-sided.

Clare Wool - BTV School Board Chairwoman

Ward 6 update - we've opened schools as of September and things are going very well for prek, k-5, 6-9 day middle schools. K-5th grade is now meeting 4 days a week in person, we're very happy with that success.

We're disappointed and concerned about HS and Technical Center - technical center has been able to relocate (220 students).

Background info: BHS was closed due to high levels of PCBs in air discovered during testing for construction project. We feel poised to get to in person learning in January at alternative sites,

we've asked for help from UVM and the Governor this week and feel confident we will come up with a solution.

How is it being paid for? We've isolated preliminary costs that were being paid for out of the revisioning fund (bond for new high school) but now giving severity and requirement of what it will take to bring buildings back on we are looking for funding elsewhere. We've reached out to: VT environmental consortium, University of Iowa who does research on PCBs, the money to pay for this should not come out of educational funds it should come from federal/state/corporate funds. This past Wednesday they proposed using Edmunds campus on Wednesdays as a short term solution as Wednesdays are at home days for Edmunds students.

The agency of education asked for a study on how we fund our school districts, those that require more support for students in need is not the same as a community that is better off with less needs.

Legislature update w/ Barbara Rachelson (Chittenden 6-6)

Barbara thanks everyone for her reelection this week. Depending on the outcome of the recount for speaker of the house we may be electing a new speaker. There's question about whether legislature will be meeting remotely or in person in Montpelier come January. Since March they've mostly been focusing on covid relief and budgeting. They also spent time last session looking at lead in water in schools.

Barbara encourages people to reach out to her - she's spent a lot of time this summer helping w/unemployment or covid relief. It's helpful to know what challenges people are facing and what ideas they have so she can bring these in to her work. She'd love to hear from you all on bill requests, she wants to make sure she knows what folks are feeling frustrated about and what their ideas are. She also wants to have a more regular presence at NPA meetings.

What would the timeline be for BHS receiving state funds? Budget adjustment will happen probably in February, if money exists already in the budget it could come this year, but if it needs to be appropriated it'll be July 1 (start of fiscal year). Right now most budgetary decisions are COVID related but there should be emergency funds available somewhere. There are other types of funds the school can apply for, Barbara wasn't sure what's being pursued. (Perhaps [CDBG money?](#))

Tom Proctor from Rights & Democracy on behalf of BTV Tenants' Union, Rights & Democracy, and CVOEO - Just Cause Evictions Proposal

[Rights & Democracy](#) - grassroots people powered movement for progressive change on local and statewide levels

July 14 Just Cause Evictions Memo:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sadxUhA4Jb8JhRo9mRPhfGapIfQOG5km/view>

Resolution here:

<https://go.boarddocs.com/vt/burlingtonvt/Board.nsf/files/BUYSEH6F382F/%24file/City%20Council%20->

[%20Referral%20To%20Charter%20Change%20Committee%20Of%20Charter%20Change%20To%20Authorize%20Ordinances%20On%20Just%20Cause%20Evictions%20\(amended%3B%20adopted%3B%20signed\).pdf](#)

In VT landlords can evict for nonpayment of rent, breach of lease, or no cause. This comes when landlords refuse to extend a lease, and counts for about 10% of eviction cases that reach the courts but this is a misleading data point because usually tenants won't have the resources to bring a no cause eviction to court.

Under this charter change Tenants could still be evicted but needs to be for just cause - and just cause depends on landlord and lease. Landlord draws up lease and decides terms, tenant decides whether to sign it.

Based on research by VT Legal Aid, the ability to evict with no cause has perpetuated harassment of tenants especially those of marginalized groups, i.e. landlord finding out tenant's sexual orientation, tenants expecting a child, child with behavioral problems, unemployment, eligibility for section 8 vouchers, becoming disabled

Landlords can also use no cause as a way to prevent tenants from reporting them for bad housing conditions or harassment. Those in most marginalized communities feel effects more and allow landlords to get away with things like poor housing conditions because they fear eviction if they report things.

[Northgate](#) has come out in favor of Just Cause, it's unknown what local university positions are on it but Tom has reached out to UVM this week for their position, has yet to hear back.

State law prohibits landlords from retaliation/harassment but it's difficult to enforce. Retaliation can only be proven if state or local agency issues a report, and landlords rarely retaliate in writing.

In most eviction cases landlord has representation and tenant does not (this shows the power dynamic that exists between landlords and tenants)

This has already passed through charter change, defines just cause as material breach of lease and nonpayment of rent. Any breach of lease requires written notice of the breach and an opportunity for the tenant to remedy it, the landlord must also give tenant information on legal services like VT legal aid. This limits landlord to unreasonably raise rent to force out tenant (currently a 25% cap on rent raise per year). It will resolve power balance and bring more security to marginalized people. This will also force property owners to maintain housing conditions and might force larger landlords to sell properties because of they can no longer defer maintenance to increase their profit margins. This will be good for first time homebuyers. It will also increase the quality of housing stock therefore increasing property values. There's also an exemption for owner-occupied buildings and the intention is to force accountability for larger landlords.

What is the nature of opposition to just cause?

- Landlords are saying this is rent control and takes away their power
- Joan Shannon - 25% rental increase cap is untrue, owner occupancy clause is untrue, there's no evidence that this will increase property values or hurt large landlords, mostly small landlords have been concerned about this

- See Gail Rose's comments in Public Forum section

Stephanie Seguino - 'Summer of Reckoning: Black Lives Matter' Photo journal of the racial justice movement in VT & beyond from Summer 2020

Beautiful slideshow and commentary from Stephanie on her photos from this summer in VT & DC. See her online portfolio for more:

<http://www.stephanieseguino.com/summer-of-protests-and-calls-to-action.html>

Meeting adjourned at 8:17

Meeting minutes by Caroline Hauser